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ABSTRACT

A description of the current status of instruction in French as a second language in China looks at its historical background, postsecondary programs, instructional materials, course organization, teaching methods and research, faculty-student relationships, graduate study, extracurricular activities, and recent educational developments in the field. It is stated that in China there are 10 language institutes, in addition to the universities, in which French is taught. Textbooks are prepared by teams of Chinese professors and are designed for two levels in a four-year course. The first level comprises four volumes, each about 350 pages long. First-level lessons contain dialogues, grammatical rules, and exercises. Each lesson is intended for 12 class hours, or one week of instruction. Of these, 2 hours are devoted to grammar, 2 to text analysis, 4 to vocabulary exercises, grammar rules, and content questions, 2 to listening comprehension, 1 to discussion, and 1 to oral presentations. Listening and speaking skills are emphasized at the beginner level. Research into teaching is encouraged, and conferences on teaching occur at three levels: department, school, and national. Each year the Chinese government sends students and researchers abroad for further training and invites foreigners to teach in China or conduct seminars in teacher training.
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THE TEACHING OF FRENCH IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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Translator's Note

Ma Hongzhi, Director of the French Department at the Beijing Languages Institute, is currently on a two-year study leave at Laval University (Quebec, Canada). "The Teaching of French in the People's Republic of China" constitutes a translation of a revised, written version of a presentation Mr. Ma gave at the Ninth Annual Conference of the Society for Accelerative Learning and Teaching, held in Houston, Texas from May 4 - 6, 1984.

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Abstract

"The Teaching of French in the People's Republic of China" contains eight sections: 1) historical background; 2) program of studies in French at the post-secondary level: a) textbooks or manuals; b) course structure; 3) teaching methods; 4) research into teaching; 5) faculty/student relations; 6) post-university student work; 7) extracurricular activities; 8) recent educational developments in China.

In China today, in addition to the major universities, there are some ten language institutes where French is taught. Textbooks for use in the teaching of French at the post-secondary level are prepared by teams of Chinese professors and are designed for two levels (a four-year course). The first level comprises four volumes, each approximately 350 pages in length. First-level lessons contain dialogues, grammatical rules and numerous exercises. Each lesson is studied for a week, i.e., twelve class hours. Two hours are devoted to grammar, two hours to explication de texte; four hours to vocabulary exercises, grammar rules and content questions; two hours to listening comprehension (usually in the language laboratory); one hour to discussion; and one hour to oral presentations. The skills of listening and speaking are emphasized with beginners,

but reading and writing are not neglected, even at the beginning level.

Research into teaching is encouraged in China and meetings or conferences on teaching take place at three levels: at the department level, at the school or institute level and at the national level. Every year the Chinese government sends students and researchers abroad for further training, while foreigners are invited to teach in China or to conduct seminars in teacher training.

1. Historical Background

The teaching of French in China predates the 1949 Liberation. In the latter part of the 19th Century, although the Qing Dynasty followed a policy of autarchy, the great Western powers--France, Great Britain and Germany, among others--forced open the door of China. Following upon the arrival of these great powers, China gradually became a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country.

China was divided by the Western powers into spheres of influence. In the large cities such as Peking, Shanghai and Canton, these foreign powers installed their consulates and their enclaves. Since they needed Chinese who could speak foreign languages and who could be put into their service, they set up English, French and German schools. Foreign missionaries were also sent to China. As a result, in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, China witnessed a gradual but nonetheless continual development of the teaching of foreign languages, including French. Secondary school graduates were required to speak a foreign language; in universities, subjects were frequently taught in languages other than Chinese as the professors were either foreign-born or native Chinese who had been educated abroad. English was the most frequently taught language at both the secondary school and university levels. However, in the north-east of China, Japanese was the most widely taught foreign language.

After Liberation, i.e., after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the government attached great importance to the teaching of foreign languages. In the 1950's, Soviet experts introduced the teaching of Russian into China, and Russian gained considerable ground in the secondary schools. Although English and French were still taught at the secondary school level, Russian was favored, as Russian translators and interpreters were urgently needed. The 1950's witnessed the establishment of departments of foreign languages in the universities. French was taught at the University of Peking (Beijing), at Zhongshan University in Canton (Guangzhou) and at the University of Nanking (Nanjing). At the same time, Institutes of Foreign Languages were founded. In the 1950's, however, French was generally not taught in these Institutes.

When discussing the development of the teaching of French in China, one must not forget the epoch-making date of 1964. In that year, France officially recognized the People's Republic of China and diplomatic relations between the two countries were re-established. This important event gave a great impetus to the development of the teaching of French in China, and French departments were set up, one after the other, in Chinese universities and foreign language institutes. In 1965, China began to send students to France to perfect their use of French.

In 1966, the Cultural Revolution began, with the consequent reform of the educational system by the ultra-leftists.

The teaching of French, like that of many other academic subjects, was suspended for about three years. French was studied, if at all, via French translations of political texts. It was only after the overthrow of the Gang of Four in 1976 that teaching in general, and the teaching of French in particular, returned to normal.

Today in the People's Republic of China, in addition to the universities, there are approximately ten language institutes where French is taught. The Beijing Foreign Languages Institute is the largest of these. In this Institute, which offers programs in some twenty foreign languages, the English department is the largest, but the French department occupies second place. Beijing has a number of language institutes; others include: the Beijing 2nd Foreign Languages Institute; the Beijing Languages Institute; and the Beijing Foreign Languages School, which has recently been promoted to the rank of an educational establishment of higher learning. French is also taught in Beijing at the Institute of Foreign Trade, the Institute of Diplomacy and the Institute of International Affairs.

Other Chinese cities also have their language institutes and language departments. In Shanghai are located the Shanghai Foreign Languages Institute and the University of Futan where French is taught in the department of foreign languages. The Shanghai teachers' training college also has a French section. In Nanjing, the University's French department has a relatively

long history, and several of its professors are very well known in China. In Guangzhou, French is taught in two schools at the post-secondary level; the Guangzhou Foreign Languages Institute is the more important one. In central China, the University of Wuhan has become a center for the teaching of French, thanks, in large measure, to the pilot programs created there by the French government. A Foreign Languages Institute was founded in Xian at the beginning of the 1960's and there are about twenty professors of French at this school. One could also mention other cities in China where French is taught. The above-mentioned institutes and departments are designed to train interpreters, translators and language teachers, as well as diplomatic personnel and/or secretarial staff fluent in one or two foreign languages. French has been taught via radio for the past three years and, as of September 1984, it will be taught via television.

2. Program of Studies in French at the Post-Secondary Level

a) Textbooks

French is not widely taught in China's secondary schools. Textbooks for post-secondary school students are designed for two levels. The first level comprises four volumes, each approximately 350 pages in length. The first volume begins with a study of French phonetics, which study consists of about ten lessons. In each of these lessons, there is a short dialogue and phonetic exercises. These ten lessons are designed to permit

the students to acquire a good pronunciation and a good intonation and, at the same time, to develop a limited communicative competence in French.

Following upon a study of phonetics, the elementary lessons proper begin. Each lesson is built around a subject and a situation, based on real life. Very often the text consists of a dialogue containing everyday expressions. The new words and idiomatic expressions are pointed out and explained, to be then used and repeated by the students in class. For each lesson, certain grammatical rules must be taught and these rules are illustrated and reinforced by numerous exercises. Each lesson is studied for about a week, i.e., twelve class hours. In China, classes are held six days a week; French or an equivalent foreign language is studied for two hours a day. The four volumes of the first level are the object of study for two years or four semesters. The content of the lesson-texts of the first two volumes deals principally with everyday life in China, in France and in other French-speaking countries. In the last two volumes one finds texts chosen or adapted from the works of French writers. In the four volumes, taken in their entirety of 1400 pages, a complete study is made of the rules of grammar. Although Chinese students may experience difficulty with verb tenses and prepositions, on the whole they have a good knowledge of French grammar after studying these manuals.

At the second level, there are two volumes, each of which comprises some 200 pages and is the object of study for two semesters. (Chinese students normally attend university or an equivalent post-secondary institution for four years). The texts of each lesson consist, for the most part, of selections from French literature. Preferred authors include such 19th Century realists as Balzac, Stendhal, Maupassant, Zola and Daudet and such 20th Century writers as Sartre and Camus. During each lesson the professor explains the difficult words and expressions, introduces the author of the selection and analyzes the style, content and interest of the text. Each lesson comprises a certain number of semantic and syntactical exercises, as well as topics or themes to be developed and Chinese-French and French-Chinese translations to be done. Very often a lesson will be studied for ten hours, or about two weeks of classes.

Textbooks or manuals for use in the teaching of French (or other foreign languages) are prepared by teams working in Chinese institutes and universities. As of the present moment, six French textbooks have been prepared for use at the first level. Four of these manuals have already been discussed and are designed to teach French to future translators, interpreters and teachers. The fifth manual has been prepared by the Institute of Foreign Trade and manifests a content and vocabulary appropriate for commerce students. The sixth manual is designed for scientists. It comprises two volumes whose lessons are characterized by an emphasis on the natural

sciences.[1] This textbook is especially designed for the accelerated teaching of French to those Chinese scientists and science students who are to be sent abroad for further study and research.

b) Course Structure

Students in the first two years of university study generally have twelve hours per week of classes in French. A lesson is studied (as previously mentioned) for twelve hours: two hours are devoted to grammar; two hours to explication de texte; four hours to exercises on vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, grammar rules and the contents of the text; two hours to listening comprehension--often in the language laboratory; one hour to discussion; and one hour to oral presentations. In addition to their classes in French, students have courses in other subjects, e.g., Chinese, politics and philosophy.

Beginning with their third year, specialist students take courses in French composition and translation, as well as in French literature and the French press. Generally speaking, each of these courses is a year-course. When the students are in their fourth year of study, they begin to prepare their graduation thesis.

Students are evaluated by two systems which are in use in China: a) a system of 5 points (which emanates from the Soviet Union and which is used for final exams); b) a system of 100 points (which comes from the United States and which is used

for tests). Insofar as the Soviet-style system is concerned, 5 is the equivalent of A; 4 would be a B; 3 equals C and 2 constitutes a failure. The grades most frequently assigned to the students are 4 and 3.

3. Teaching Method(s)

For those students in first and second year French who normally start out as beginners, a method is used which emphasizes the skills of listening and speaking. (This does not mean that reading and writing are neglected, however). According to this "method," the professor should encourage his students to talk as much as possible in class on suitable subjects in the foreign language and he should create an atmosphere that encourages the students to manifest their intelligence and their competence in the language. Apart from the language laboratory, one of the means used to accomplish this goal of "communicative competence" is the use of slides and photographs. The lesson is first studied thoroughly and, when the appropriate slides are projected in the classroom, the students talk in front of them and explain what they see.

As was previously mentioned, each lesson has a specific subject. For example, in the first-level manual, there is a lesson entitled, "Une promenade au Temple du Ciel"; for this lesson, use is made of slides which have been taken of the various parts of this religious-historical complex. Another lesson has as its title: "Une excursion à la Grande Muraille."

Details are given concerning this historical monument: for example, that the Great Wall is the only construction which can be seen from the moon. Sayings are included, such as: "he who has not climbed the Great Wall is not brave." Still another lesson has as its theme a visit to the Summer Palace in Beijing, and so on.

The more advanced classes, i.e., classes in the third and fourth years, often take the form of seminars. However, there are also courses which consist of formal lectures.

4. Research into Teaching

Research into teaching is very much encouraged in the People's Republic of China. Research not only contributes to the progress of teaching per se, but also improves the performance of the individual teacher in the classroom. Each professor chooses one or two subjects which are relevant to his work in teaching. Every year, conferences and lectures are organized to facilitate the exchange of information on, and results of pedagogical research. The appropriate proceedings are then published in scholarly periodicals.

Meetings or conferences on teaching take place at three levels: at the departmental level, at the school or institute level, and at the national level. The National Association of Research into the Teaching of French is an organization at the national level in which all sections or departments of French are represented; it is responsible to the Chinese Ministry of

Education. Each year this association organizes one or two conferences during which teaching experiences are exchanged. Its duties also include the elaboration of curriculum and the examination of newly-prepared (but as yet unpublished) manuals.

5. Faculty/Student Relations

Following upon a selection examination for university entrance, post-secondary students are grouped into "classes." In each class there are fifteen to twenty students (who normally enter university at age eighteen). Each class has a group leader, a study leader and a cultural leader. Members of the same class study and take their courses together. In China, all university students live in residence; their professors, too, often live within the school complex and are assigned quarters according to age, status and number of children. Teacher/student rapport is good. It is said in China that the professor should have affection for his students and that the student should show respect towards his teachers. Professors and students have frequent contacts outside the classroom. Professors often visit their students in their dormitories, occasionally give them advice on, or help with their work and sometimes assist them in resolving personal, as well as academic problems. A professor is held especially responsible for those of his students who are in their first year of university. Students respect their professors' work; they prepare their classes diligently and always submit their written work on time. Students

enjoy good relations with other members of the class; the members of the group help each other in their studies and in everyday life.

At the conclusion of each semester, the Dean presides over a meeting which is held to appreciate and evaluate the quality of teaching by his staff. Each class sends a representative to this meeting. The student representatives present their opinions on faculty teaching, but in a tactful manner.

6. Post-university Student Work

When Chinese students have completed their post-secondary education, the government (i.e., a government committee) assigns them jobs. Before doing so, however, the Ministry of Education draws up a list of all vacant positions in teaching, the diplomatic service, etc., and establishes a plan for work distribution. Once set up, this plan will be sent to the various educational institutions of higher learning and made known to the students. Each student fills out a questionnaire in which he indicates three or four job preferences (interpreter, diplomat, etc.). Before the jobs are finally handed out, the students are consulted by appropriate department heads so that they have a chance to obtain a desired job. Although there are usually no problems attached to job distribution, some positions are better than others, and it is to be noted that grades play an important role in the obtaining of a preferred job.

7. Extracurricular Activities

Student life in the People's Republic of China is rich in cultural activities. For example, each semester a song competition is organized; each class prepares two or three songs and presents them in a competition before a jury. Prizes are awarded to the winners. There are frequent lectures on matters of cultural, literary and artistic interest; writers, professors, artists and scientists are invited to give special lectures to the students. When holidays are celebrated, evenings are devoted to music and dance; such "social dances" as the waltz and fox trot are very popular in China. Every week a Chinese film and a foreign-language film are shown. French films come from the French Embassy in Beijing.

Every year there is a sports competition, while almost every day volleyball, basketball or football games are played. In those Institutes with extensive sports facilities (such as the Beijing Languages Institute), ping-pong may be played at almost any hour; swimming pools are open during the summer; in winter, in the north of China, students go skating. In springtime, the school organizes outings to the public parks or the suburbs; students in Beijing, for example, frequently visit the Great Wall. All transportation costs for these excursions are paid by the institution concerned.

Each semester, Chinese students are obliged to perform one week of manual work; they may, for example, go out into

the countryside to help the peasants harvest the crops or plant trees. The week of physical labor allows the students to become better acquainted with the life of the workers and peasants and to be in contact with the community at large.

8. Recent Educational Developments in China

In recent years, the People's Republic of China has taken the initiative in developing relations with foreign countries; these overtures are also visible in the field of education. Each year the Chinese government sends students and researchers to the developed countries so they can receive further training in their area of specialization. Chinese delegations are sent abroad to visit schools and universities. Foreigners are invited to teach in China or to conduct seminars in teacher training.

At the present moment, careful attention is being paid in China to the need to restructure the curriculum in language institutes. Questions are being asked, for example: Should new objectives be adopted for the training of students? Should the students have not just one, but two subjects of specialization? Two subjects of specialization would open up more job possibilities upon graduation. Projects are being drawn up with a view to these (and other) possible changes. In certain institutions, a new course structure has already been put into operation. For example, at the Beijing Languages Institute, the foreign-language program now takes five (instead of four) years to

complete. During this five-year period, students have two subjects of specialization, either two foreign languages, or Chinese and a foreign language. Upon the conclusion of their studies, they thus receive two diplomas and have the opportunity of becoming foreign-language teachers; teachers of Chinese; bilingual or multi-lingual secretaries; interpreters or translators in two (or more) languages.

Note

[1] Ma Hongzhi is the principal author of this two-volume textbook for Chinese scientists: Manuel de français À l'usage des scientifiques, published in Beijing in 1981-82. Mr. Ma has also published Chinese translations of the plays of A. Dumas fils, articles on French grammar, French phonology, and the difficulties Chinese students experience in learning French.